

The New Testament was written to explain the Torah to Gentile believers and to explain the Messiah to Jewish believers. It is basically a Jewish document and wants to hook both groups up to the truths of G-d's Word. In this life, humanity is not yet one people. We possess gender, race and social standing. Once the kingdom comes, all of these differences will dissolve. Part of Israel's calling is to be a light to the nations and to declare the reality of the one true G-d.

Ephesians 2:11-22 deals with the peace which our Messiah accomplished through the blood of the cross. Before they came to faith, Gentiles were far from G-d and were strangers to the promises of G-d. Paul says they were deprived of citizenship in Israel and had no participation in the covenants of promise. They were without Messiah and without hope in the world. Jewish believers had to come to an understanding that our gentile brethren were no longer strangers, even if they did not become Jews.

We have a shared spiritual citizenship that is no longer separated by any hostility and any gap that existed between Jewish believers and Gentile believers has been closed. In the early church, Judaism was such a major religion that was growing so quickly that some believers still thought that Gentiles had to become Jews when they came to faith in the Messiah. They still had to receive the Jewish scriptures, but they did so as Gentiles, without becoming Jews.

There have always been Gentile sojourners in Jewish communities and while they were treated fairly and were very active community members, there was still a distance between them and their Jewish neighbours. The temple of Jerusalem even had a wall to separate full Jews from their Gentile converts and sojourners.

Paul is explaining that this wall is broken down in the Messiah and that Gentile believers have full citizenship in the promises and covenants of Israel without having to convert to Judaism. Judaism had elaborate rituals they had to perform in order to approach and draw near to G-d. Their defilement was contained and even atoned for (cleansed), but it never really went away until Messiah came and shed His blood for all mankind.

Because of this new status, Messiah has abolished the need for all the ceremonies and rituals which Jews had to perform if they wanted to approach G-d. He did not abolish or even alter the Torah, the Prophets or the writings. He fulfilled in reality what the rituals and sacrifices did symbolically. Jewish people knew that the reality of salvation and the coming of the Messianic would one day remove the need for all the ceremonies and sacrifices.

Humanity's separation from G-d was only addressed symbolically before the Messiah came and moved things along. Both Jewish and Gentile believers are now equal fellow citizens of the Israel of G-d. It has always been understood that this reality was generational and did not just apply to any one generation of Israel. Israel was understood to be the doorway back to G-d, but the status of those Gentiles who came through the door, without becoming Jews, had to be addressed.

Saying that there is only one body in the Messiah in no way means that the identity of either Jews or Gentiles disappears. Gentiles and Jews form the one new man and the foundation remains the declared word of G-d (the Apostles and the Prophets).

Things that separate us in this life are only temporary conditions in the light of eternity and this even applies to gender. Gender was created to prevent loneliness and for the conception of children. Neither gender is superior to the other and both equally express the full image of G-d. There is however both a masculine and a feminine approach to spirituality, without there being any competition between the two.

The same applies to the two groups of people who have become one new man in the Messiah. Jews are the people of G-d with the mandate to become a blessing to all nations and to teach the world faith in G-d and obedience to His Word. The sacrificial system was an elaborate system of symbols to give the people a temporary, symbolic atonement until the full power of forgiveness was achieved on the cross through the blood of our beloved Messiah.

Jewish people are the guardians of the blue prints to show the nations how to walk with G-d and how to avoid the two worst besetting sins of mankind: idolatry and fornication. Israel was never intended to be seen as an elite club with a special status far above what any Gentile could hope for. There have always been prophets of G-d among the nations and the first ritual meal celebrated with the elders of Israel after our liberation from Egyptian slavery was conducted by a Gentile priest, Jethro.

For the first several centuries of our life as a nation, Jewish people struggled not to assimilate or absorb any of the paganism of the nations who surrounded us. If the truth be told, when the Maccabees liberated Jerusalem and cleansed the temple it was the successful conclusion of a civil war between Torah observant Jews and those who had adopted the religion of the Greeks. There are still Jews who fall away from the Torah and join other religions, but that has never been the case with Messianic Jews. When we come to faith in the Messiah we do not cease being Jews and our Judaism does not begin to diminish and eventually disappear.

Just as there will be two genders until the kingdom comes, there will be two valid expressions of faith in our beloved Messiah – one Jewish and one Gentile. Believers have not lost anything when they come to faith. Gentiles are no longer strangers and are no longer far away from G-d. Peace with G-d and peace between Gentiles and their fellow Jewish believers is something which our Messiah fully accomplished.

There is another facet of our faith that is easy to misunderstand. Both temples only represented a heavenly reality where the redeemed of mankind will unite into a single temple and become the eternal dwelling place of G-d. This is what Messiah is building in our midst, generation by generation and to the Jew first and also to the Gentile. Despite our differences which now characterize the nations of mankind, there is only really one people of G-d, composed of the nations and generations of believers.

The temple in Jerusalem was not made redundant by what our Messiah accomplished for us on the cross. It still remained a focal point for prayer and worship for the early church because of its historic and symbolic value. Once it was destroyed and Jews could no longer offer the sacrifices which Messiah fulfilled, synagogue prayers and rituals developed to repeat that which could no longer be physically offered. As these prayers are being offered, there is a special prayer which asks G-d to receive them as if the actual sacrifices had been performed. What these symbols portray is still important for us to understand because they describe all the wonder which Messiah accomplished for us by His life, death and resurrection.

Believers are the only temple which G-d will recognize and it is the only one which He is building. Despite some very bumpy times and too frequent set backs among the generations of believers, this construction is being built as a well coordinated habitation for G-d. The building blocks are being attached from both among the Jews and the Gentiles. It is a wonderful spiritual reality which is actually our final destination when we leave this life.

It is not something which human architects are undertaking. It is a work of the Spirit of G-d in our blessed Messiah. We may not have an easy time of it as we pass through this life in our generations, but in our Messiah we have a wonderful spiritual identity and an incredible spiritual destination.

In this life, we may be separated into different nations, but, in the Messiah, there is no separation between believers and G-d. Over and above all that we are in this life and all that we do as we wander through this life, we are a single redeemed people of G-d, having both full redemption and full atonement in the Messiah.

We possess a certain citizenship in this life, which may change as we move from one country to another. But over and above all the temporary bonds which we form in this life, we have an amazing heavenly citizenship because of what our Messiah accomplished for us. We may belong to any number of nationalities and ethnic groups, especially in the diverse group of peoples who have come to Canada, but in the Messiah, we form one single nationality which is sometimes called the Israel of G-d.

All of the symbolic stipulations of holiness are fulfilled in our Messiah. The moral stipulations of the Torah still apply equally to Jews and to Gentiles. Gentiles are not required to practice circumcision and are not obligated to keep kosher. They are also not required to follow the festival cycle, but Sabbath observance is one of the ten commandments and Gentiles are not free from this obligation.

Much of the symbolism of the Torah can be applied to how Gentiles conduct their lives, especially as it refers to avoiding idolatry and fornication. Some people also refer to Judaeo-Christian morality which is firmly based in the Scriptures. Even traditional Jews and Gentiles have a lot in common when it comes to an understanding of what is right and wrong.

The big misunderstanding which our passage helps us to correct is the spiritual identity of believers. It is generally thought that only Gentiles believe in Yeshua and that when Jews come to faith, they somehow cease being a part of Israel and the Jewish people. Many traditional Jews are quite hostile to Messianic Judaism and do not permit Jewish believers in Yeshua to have an active part in their communities.

I would not feel uncomfortable attending a traditional Jewish service, any more than I would feel uncomfortable attending a Gentile church service. Both groups have developed beliefs and traditions which are not found in the Bible and I neither accept these or feel obligated to follow them.

However, this is not the hostility which Paul is addressing in our passage. He is referring to the spiritual alienation which Gentile believers experienced because they were far from the word of G-d and had not become part of the covenants if promise. Jews were closer to G-d because of their knowledge of the Bible.

The hostility between the two groups was mainly based on the pagan beliefs and practices which Gentiles had to abandon when they came to faith in the Messiah of promise. The Gentiles did not have any real knowledge of G-d and did not understand what it meant to please G-d and live a life based on biblical holiness.

In the days of the early Messianic community, there was a strong pull by the secular society to get Jews away from the truth of G-d's Word and get them to practice any of a number of competing religions. This hostility is gone, because both believers from both groups worship the same G-d and obey the same Word. Spiritual hostility is not the same thing as antisemitism. Messianic Jews are just as liable to experience antisemitism as traditional Jews and under the Nazis, Christians with a Jewish ancestor were slaughtered along with other Jews.

Together, both Jewish and Gentile believers have peace with G-d and in our Messiah, we have equal access to the Father through the same Spirit. Our spiritual identity should have a big impact on our lives, no matter which group or nation we belong to.

One day even languages will disappear and the mighty heavenly temple will appear and in a real sense, each of us is part of that construction. It is not so much a static building as it is a redeemed generational community to which all believers will belong on equal terms, both as Jews and as Gentiles. Neither group is more precious to G-d than the other and our Messiah is both the King of the Jews and the King of the nations.

Some of us lived lives far away from G-d and others of us lived lives closer to G-d. Messiah healed the breach between us and made peace for the one new man. Traditional Judaism is not forsaken by G-d and Gentile believers do not replace Israel as the true people of G-d. Not all the children of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob will be received by G-d when the kingdom comes and not all the members of the nations will be rejected because of their lack of Jewish ancestry.

In a very real way, the history of Israel is a history of how a merciful G-d relates to a rebellious and a fractious people. He is looking for people who are looking for Him and for His righteousness. Being a G-d seeker is more important than belonging to any ethnic group. I do not fully understand all of G-d's dealings with the nations of the world, or even with people of Jewish ancestry.

His Word is a love call which wants to embrace all of mankind and return us to the Garden which we were excluded from. Not everyone will make the final selection, but once that occurs, there will only be a single people who will spend eternity worshipping G-d.

All of our differences will disappear, along with all and any damage and pain we have lived through. Ephesians has been called a love epistle because Paul is reaching out in love to both Jews and Gentiles. He wants us to respond to our heavenly calling and understand the eternal unity which we all possess. We have a solid foundation in our Messiah and in the words of the apostles and the prophets. We will live differently and we will act differently when we understand our true spiritual identity. Sometimes both Gentile believers and traditional Jews annoy me because they cannot see the truth which is right in front of their eyes. I want to fully embrace this truth and help anyone who will listen to come to the Messiah who died for them. Have a good week. Shabbat Shalom.